

A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF SWISS SPORT TARGET SHOOTING

The Swiss tradition of arms-bearing and a militia army should be put in historical perspective. The Swiss Confederation was founded in 1291 by men from three Cantons who swore mutual support and protection. In the ensuing historical epochs, smaller numbers of armed Swiss peasants defeated some of the most powerful armies during the old Swiss Confederacy period. It grew further over centuries by forming a loose Confederacy of 13 cities and small valley communities dominating the rest of the country, and they remained mostly unmolested until the onset of the French revolution in 1798.

The old Swiss Confederacy was much affected during the revolution in Europe between 1798 and 1848, and it went through some complex socio/political structuring processes of mediation, restoration and re-generation phases. In 1848 it led ultimately to a new Federal Constitution by combining elements of the U.S. constitution, allowing for a federal state with central and cantonal governments and parliaments, appropriately fused with the experience of the French revolutionary tradition.

The principles of this constitution are still valid today, including the **physical defence** of those principles by the citizens of the Swiss Confederation.

The Swiss Confederation and its people endured some severe tests during World War I, and the following economic crisis between 1918 to 1933 and World War II. It is believed that its **neutral** but **armed** state policy, and the citizen **willingness to defend** its country have saved its people from an armed conflict on its home soil since 1848.

Henri Guisan, who was the Commander in-Chief of the Swiss armed forces during World War II, described the Swiss shooting culture in 1939 as follows:

While traveling around Switzerland on Sundays, everywhere one hears gunfire, but it is a peaceful gunfire! This is the Swiss practising their favourite sport, their national sport. They are doing their obligatory shooting, or practicing for the Regional, Cantonal or Federal Shooting Festivals, as their ancestors did it with the musket, the harquebus or the crossbow. Everywhere, one meets urbanites and country people, rifle to the shoulder, causing foreigners to exclaim: "You are having a revolution!" Today's foreign visitors touring Switzerland must think exactly that.

It is also recorded that Henri Guisan said about the armed citizen:

Entering into any of our farms one finds there as many rifles as men. There is a saying: "Every Swiss enters the world with a rifle!"

The rifle, is considered an outward symbol of the dignity of the citizen, of the confidence that the state places in him, is hung on the wall next to the arms of ancient times, shooting prizes, and family portraits.

The Schützenfests (Shooting Festival) played a central role in the Old Swiss

Confederacy, during the 15th century, when participants were shooting the crossbow, contributing significantly to the coherence between the individual cantons. The Schützenfest of 1849 in Aarau figures prominently in the Swiss author Gottfried Keller's "Das Fähnlein der sieben Aufrechten". Keller portrayed the shooting clubs as vital for the preservation of direct democracy in the young Swiss federal state at the time.

Based on the foregoing deliberations it would appear, that the armed citizen who defends the freedom of his own family and his neighbours was, and remains, the hallmark of the Swiss historically founded experience!

The Schweizer Schiess- Sportverband (SSV) was formed in 2001 after fusion of the formerly independent Schweizerischer Sportschützenverband SSSV and Schweizerischer Arbeiterschützen-Bund SASB).

The Eidgenössische Schützenfeste are organized by the Schweizerischer Schützeninstitutionen since 1824.

The SSV organizes the Eidgenössische Schützenfeste, in intervals of five years. Today a Swiss Federal Schützenfest attracts up to 50'000 marksmen during the 4 weeks event.

The SSV has some 85,000 members. From its "radical" origins, the Swiss shooting clubs have evolved into a staunchly conservative milieu with considerable political leverage, although the 2001 fusion with the explicitly socialist shooting associations (Arbeiterschützen) tends to emphasize the purely sportive character of the contemporary SSV, with lobbyist activity contained to issues directly connected with gun laws

Schützenfeste are also organized by Swiss expatriate communities residing overseas where they formed sport shooting institutions in association with the SSV mother body in Switzerland.

Various awards for marksmanship are given to excelling competitors. Shooting medals and shooting cups are the most common forms of award. Books illustrating and listing these awards have been published in Switzerland.

Swiss shooting medals were struck in a variety of metals including gold, silver, bronze, white metal and aluminium, with silver being the most common. Mintages are very low with the average mintage of the 45mm silver being 700-800 pieces. The scarcity of medals has increased over the years due to the awards being melted for bullion, being lost, and general attrition. The size of most medals range from 23 millimetres to 62 millimetres, with 45 mm being the most prevalent.

Also minted to commemorate the Shooting Festival were shooting thalers. Swiss shooting thalers began mintage in 1842, and continue being minted today. They can be distinguished from shooting medals by their uniform size and temporary legal tender status.